

Invisible Jukebox

Each month we play an artist or group a series of records which they are asked to identify and comment on – with no prior knowledge of what they are about to hear. This month it's the turn of

Hype Williams

Tested by Lisa Blanning. Photography by Tara Darby

Missy 'Misdemeanor' Elliott

"Supa Dupa Fly (The Rain)"

From *Supa Dupa Fly* (Elektra) 1997

Inga Copeland: That was my jogging song for ages.

Maybe it's obvious we played this because of who directed its video. Why did you choose that name?

Dean Blunt: There's certain things that can't be spoken about for loads of different reasons, but there's a lady called Denna that's involved and there's this whole thing about us looking after a project by her that was given to us, and the name Hype Williams doesn't really have anything to do with anything. The director's popularity has risen over the past couple of years and he's slipped into so many different kinds of things that it now seems linked, whereas at the time, when the name was chosen, from what I gather, it didn't mean anything. It was just this guy that used to make videos and yeah, you used to see it watching MTV – [unenthusiastically] 'Oh yeah, Hype Williams, cool' – and that was it. To be honest, I don't think I even like that many of his videos.

IC: I do think they are kind of very defining, though. It was that time when people got loads of money all of a sudden.

DB: Well, hip-hop got loads of money.

IC: It just exploded in the most obvious ways. 'OK, guys, we've got loads of money, let's blow it all. Let's not leave anything behind.' Visually, I think it is almost in the beginning of all this internet culture, this hyper-imagery, do you know what I mean? It's quite interesting. But not my taste.

DB: I think it's just growing up in Hackney, I was around this all the time. This is part of the culture I had, visually, MTV, everything, how we dressed, it was all influenced by that bling culture, whatever it was called at the time. And that was it. I think it was just youth. Everything that I do is always informed by growing up in London.

American hip-hop is pervasive. You read accounts of people's travels in Africa, Asia, or what have you, and they'll still hear American hip-hop.

DB: It's everywhere. And I think as much as UK Garage and all these things were involved, this was very big music when I was growing up. We had this crew and we all tried to dress like DMX, we'd all have bald heads and just sideburns [laughs]. We looked retarded, but it was all down to MTV and Hype Williams.

IC: Even in Estonia, the only prominent scene that anyone cared about for ages was hip-hop.

The Residents

"Japanese Watercolor"

From *Commercial Album* (Ralph) 1980

DB: I know it's Residents, I'm not sure which song. [Hums along]

It's "Japanese Watercolor". It seems like what they do might resonate, possibly even inform, what you guys do?

DB: In what way, the multimedia?

Also the way they obscure their identities, and their playfulness.

DB: Yeah, the best art is funny. The best art has humour in it. You can't take yourself too seriously.

IC: They definitely have that.

DB: I don't know if they influence us much, because I don't really pay that much attention. I only realised The Residents had eyeballs or they covered themselves up quite recently. But yeah, I think they are amazing because I just pay attention to their art. I really don't care about anything else. And I think with that kind of stuff it takes a while for people to get that because they're so obsessed with trying to find out about you, and then after a while your art starts to shine through. And I think that becomes the main focus because people realise they can't penetrate this forcefield that you have around you. Residents have done that very well because all I know about them is their work and I'm very happy about that. Some of it I'm not crazy about, but a lot of it, especially *Commercial Album*, is really good.

IC: For me, the best artists... as you said, for you the humour aspect is really important, and that's one thing. And another thing is that they're conveying an atmosphere, they're not really conveying a style of music first and foremost. When you get artists like that, you might like one song and not like the other song, but it's all part of the same whole. It is their art in the end.

Ariel Pink's Haunted Graffiti

"Life In LA"

From *Worn Copy* (Paw Tracks) 2005

DB: I've heard this intro a few times. [Guitar comes in] Michael Bolton! [Laughs] You know that tune he did, the demo tapes, the Bolton tapes [both laugh].

So you know what it is. Are you attracted to the sun-bleached sound of so-called Hypnagogic pop?

DB: Oh man, I hate it. I am really, really into sounds of the UK and I'm really into the darkness and the moodiness of it that no one else can do. It's in Jungle, it's in Hardcore, it's in so many different types of music. It's in music like Shadow Ring, it's in This Heat, it's a specific sound and I don't find this sound appealing because it's not me. Just like I don't find American comedy funny. It's the same thing. It's a sentiment that doesn't really work for me. Is Ariel considered Hypnagogic pop as well?

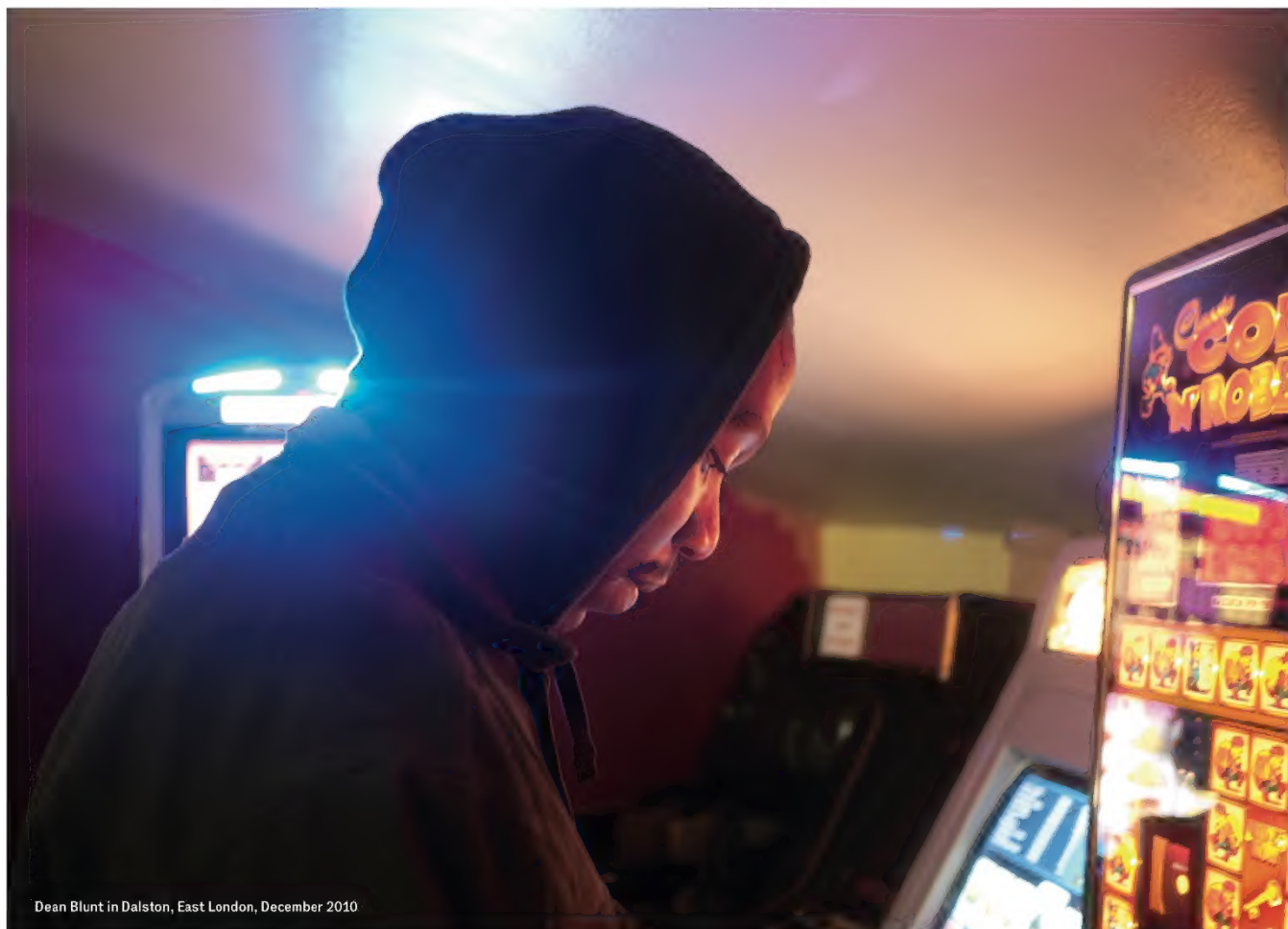
This album predates the term, but it certainly has all of the traits of Hypnagogic pop.

DB: I only really heard the thing quite recently and I

Hype Williams is the performing name of Inga Copeland and the pseudonymous Dean Blunt, but the boundaries of the duo project are not easily defined. Although they clearly prefer not to adhere to conventional notions of a 'group', they admit, or disseminate the idea, that the project – which shares the name of the music video and film director famous for his work with Missy Elliott, TLC and more – was placed in their care by a woman named Denna Frances Glass, who may or may not still be involved. The pair, who both appear to be in their mid-twenties, met and started working together about two years ago in London, where Blunt was born and raised. Copeland is Russian but raised primarily in Estonia. Both work in various media, including sculpture. Last year they relocated to Berlin.

While Hype Williams have a number of small-run releases, their first official LP was released on Carnivals in early 2010. Quickly recognised for its warm and hazy synth-instrumentals with tinny Casio beats, clumsy percussion, unspooled samples and a spirit of exploratory openness, it was suffused with amateurish but intuitive charm, even as it was coupled with a playfully sardonic, if somewhat calculated, enigmatic attitude. They quickly followed it with a 7" and second LP, *Find Out What Happens When People Stop Being Polite, And Start Gettin Reel*, both on De Stijl. Continuing their strain of musical inquisitiveness and tactile evocation, at once knowing and shambolic, their work dovetails perfectly with the primarily American phenomenon of Hypnagogic pop. A third album, *One Nation*, is scheduled for release in March via the American label Hippos In Tanks – also the outlet for Oneohtrix Point Never side project Games.

The Jukebox took place in East London.



Dean Blunt in Dalston, East London, December 2010

haven't heard anyone... I think I've heard one James Ferraro song. I'm not attracted to that sound, because it's not where I'm from, so I don't see why I would make it. I'm not from there, so it's not what I hear when I hear my stuff. When we make stuff we listen to it loads because it's almost like hearing something, like being entertained by a new song you've heard. And I don't hear that. I hear smoking weed and playing Playstation, and going to the Trocadero, you know. Walking around Tottenham, Broadwater Farm at night and stuff. I don't hear 'beach' and 'LA' because I haven't been to LA.

IC: It would be, and it is, very hypocritical when people here try to make that kind of music and I haven't heard anyone successfully convey that. It's the same way that I would be very surprised if someone in LA did Grime.

DB: American Grime is terrible.

IC: I think it's very funny, when you just said that Ariel is Hypnagogic. It sounds to me, though, a little bit dry to classify people like that, like a doctor having to give a diagnosis: 'Oh, you've got symptoms of that and a little bit of that', and it starts being like you're a file in a library or a doctor's file. I don't think you can put things under an umbrella like that, because what does it really give you?

But that argument would have to apply to any classification, not just Hypnagogic pop.

DB: But some people assume their roles a lot more than others. I just think Ariel is pop and he's into classic rock and this is his interpretation of it. That's it. I'm making pop in my head, maybe it's not coming out very well, because I'm not very well equipped, or I'm not a musician in that sense, but that's what I'm making. I'm not 'experimental'. I'm just making stuff with not much knowledge of traditional ways of making music. What someone else calls it is really not relevant in any way.

IC: Well, I can see that in the last album [*Before Today*], which is pop song after pop song, Ariel always wanted to make high quality pop music and just didn't have the means, that's it. When you see them live, they're like a proper rock band, you know what I mean? Very tight, everything is super hi-fi.

This song's called "Life In LA", so it is meant to specifically evoke the California thing. I actually get that same sort of warmth from you guys... I actually thought that it might be because you came from countries that were not warm.

[Both laugh]

But I see now that that's not the case.

DB: It's not like I'm trying to make anything dark, but

I have a really romantic thing about the city. To me it's warm, but I think that's what I mean. It's a moody place. England kind of likes being moody. It's kind of like happy moodiness. It's dark and it's dark vibes and it's moody, but I'm quite romantic about that and I guess it comes out in a quite sentimental, warm... IC: ... optimistic way.

Peter Ivers & Laurel Near "In Heaven"

From Various: *Eraserhead OST* (IRS) 1982

DB: [Laughs softly] Christopher Cross, that's what it is. Swear I've got this one right.

IC: Your music knowledge has been a secret to me till this day [laughs].

DB: I didn't know I had it. [Pauses] Yeah, Lynch.

David Lynch, obviously. The music in his work plays a large role. I was going to play you something from *Twin Peaks* because of some of the devices you use – like the backwards talking and the whole Angelo Badalamenti kind of cinematic feel.

IC: That's really interesting. Especially when we started off, we used speeches in stuff and we would invent imaginary *Twin Peaks* dialogues or monologues or whatever and use that. We don't really do that anymore, but it's funny that for some people it has

“There is no goal or intention, it’s just to give the truth at the time”

Dean Blunt

stayed as a reference. That’s not something that I directly think about at all when we make music now. It has been there in the past as some sort of vague reference point, but not so much anymore.

DB: I don’t think I ever really found it a reference point. David Lynch does things and doesn’t explain it and that drives people crazy, but to me he is a very good artist in that sense. And maybe he is trying to provoke. It’s like that complete freedom to watch something and take it in and be given the privilege to completely make up what you want from it.

IC: You’re doing something not to achieve a goal – the actual process of making it really appeals.

The Caretaker “Unmasking Alzheimer’s”

From *Persistent Repetition Of Phrases* (Install) 2008

DB: I don’t know what it is, but it’s quite nice.

It’s The Caretaker

DB: Oh really? I’ve heard the name.

He used to be in a project involving a lot of pranksterism called V/VM. The name The Caretaker is a reference to the book and the film *The Shining*. A lot of his music is like ballroom songs filtered through layers of memory. What kind of emotions are you trying to convey with your music? Do you think

about it in that way?

DB: No, not at all. I don’t think we ever think about it beforehand. There’s no goal or intention, it’s just to give the truth at the time. You can’t really go wrong. Whether it’s ‘good’ is not the point. It’s the truth.

IC: I find that’s a measure of whether a song is good or not, often. Most often the songs I personally find best are the ones that you paint an image in your head of some kind of situation or emotion. What you were trying to do is completely irrelevant, but what it comes out as lives its own life.

DB: We’ve got a record out in March, and what it evokes is down to how it was recorded and when it was recorded, but it has a certain feel to it that is very specific to me, and maybe someone else hears it and it doesn’t mean that in any way whatsoever to them.

DJ Screw & Big Moe “City Of Syrup”

From *As The World Turns Slow* (Wreckless Entertainment) 2002

DB: [Smiling] Harmonica, damn. Some G-funk harmonica.

It’s probably more obvious once the vocals come in.

DB: It’s Pee-Wee Herman on codeine [both laugh].

It’s so skippy. It’s perky, perky G-funk [laughs. Vocals come in] It’s definitely Screw.

To my ears it sounds like your last album owes a bit to DJ Screw.

DB: I dunno, man. When you make something and you’re a bit bored of listening to it 100 times after making it, you look at what you have. You don’t really want to record anything more, and the only thing that’s on the eight-track tape is a pitchshifter. You just mess around with it. ‘I’m used to this track, I can’t be bothered to record anything more’, and you just mess around with it. And ‘Oh, it sounds like a different song, it sounds better like this’. Or take the tape out and turn it round and it sounds better in reverse or something. It’s just another tool. It’s almost like another instrument, you know. So the DJ Screw thing, I find it’s cool, but man, it can be boring as hell, that music. It really can. I can’t listen to that music, it really does kill me after a while. Just like I can’t listen to Juke that much. It’s just too extreme.

Because it’s just one idea over and over again.

DB: Yeah, and again and again.

IC: People seem to really like it – I find it extremely soulless and that is my issue with it. It might be good production or interesting things added, but it’s so... You know in some horror films where the devil drains the soul out of people or something? That is what it is for me.

DB: With Screw, you can hear that this guy is just wasted and really just fucking around. He’s made I don’t know how many tapes. But to make an entire genre off of that is pushing it.

IC: I also think that’s the problem with current music, that people find a gimmick, whether it’s slowing down songs or they’ll find a specific sound on a synth that they might...

DB: Like the dubstep *woahwoahwohwoh...*

IC: But when it’s the second album, what are you going to do? Your whole being is based on this one note or this one trick. It’s not conveying an – again, I’m coming back, for me it’s all about the atmosphere. You’re not doing anything. Because if you make music under an umbrella of an atmosphere, you can change the sound completely, or you can get rid of your

gimmicks and do something else, still doing the same thing within your sort of intention.

Toro Y Moi “Human Nature”

From Various: *Chum Onah: BxF Celebrates The Music Of M Jackson* (ButterFace DL) 2009

IC: Is it Games?

No, but you recognise the track?

DB: I know where it’s come from, yeah.

It’s Toro Y Moi.

DB: He played a festival that we played at.

You have released a version of Sade’s “The Sweetest Taboo”. What makes you want to reinterpret a specific song?

DB: When I was a kid, I used to have this thing where I would have a dream and a girl from my school would be in it, and the next day I’d have to ask her out because of it. It was just this weird thing I had to do, and I think I have the same thing with covers. It just pops into your head and you’re just like, ‘I want to do that song’, and literally that happens and I get obsessed with having to do that song until we’ve done it. And that’s it. It’s really weird. I just wake up with this, you have this weird attraction to this track which you might not have even liked before.

IC: We never listened to it. I don’t remember listening to Sade a lot.

DB: I think I have a relation to it, I remember it a lot from when I was a kid. I really heard that shit a lot, her and Steely Dan, tons. Maybe I was missing my mum or something, I dunno. That’s probably what it was. And it was like, I need to see Sade, because it was the dance in the video as well, I really liked her dancing. That was it, and it just comes from there. There’s no real thought, as with most things.

IC: It’s the same with making any other music, you’re filtering your own life. Like you said, that guy [The Caretaker] was obsessed with memories, you’re filtering your memories, your emotions, and they become filtered through your creativity. They become music. It’s like sleeping, you don’t always know why you dream of this or that or why that comes into play, but it’s like reiterating it’s a practice. It’s quite a selfish activity in a way, it’s not directed at anyone in particular, or it’s not drawing references for cultural purposes in terms of commenting or something. It’s quite a self-obsessed project.

Lil B “My Window Sill”

From *Rain In England* (Weird Forest) 2010

DB: I heard this the other day. It’s that *Rain In England* stuff. I was watching some videos of him getting knocked out the other day. It was really funny, he’s such a strange dude.

Part of the reason it’s so interesting, part of the reason why I think this is so good, it’s a juxtaposition of two things that you really don’t think are meant to be together – rap and Ambient. I think your music is a lot about juxtapositions as well, bringing in a lot of different things and putting them together. Is that something that concerns you?

DB: Once again, so is London. London is everything, you know. You know, I grew up and there was no concept of any difference. It has got everything thrown together. I exposed myself to a lot of things.



Inga Copeland

My family are *Sun* readers, working class, kind of ignorant in ways, but I, for whatever reason, was into so many different things from watching TV all day. It's not intentional. I mean, I'm surprised a lot more people don't just throw it together. As I said before, people assume their roles so easily. They just accept 'this is what I am' and sell themselves short. And even the concept of calling yourself is boxing yourself in. People haven't quite realised that 'experimental' is now a sound. Experimental doesn't mean anything. It's a genre as well. If someone said, 'I'm going to an experimental show', I'd know what they're gonna hear. That shouldn't be the case at all.

IC: You can't really hold onto that. It's like holding on to an underground that doesn't exist. Just better accept that this is the way things are now and maybe it's for the best because you don't have to be a snob about things. You can just like whatever you like. You take whatever you want. I actually prefer it this way. It's all internet. For me, it's just strange when people, as you say, don't throw it together because it is all there. Everyone has access to everything, you don't have to just go to one thing. [In the past] you'd either have access to jazz or you'd have access to this just because of the neighbourhood you live in or the people you know. Now you can do whatever you want.

Ruff Squad "And Ting"

From *Extra/And Ting 12*" (Ruff Squad Recordings) 2005

IC: [Both smile] Speaking of Grime...

DB: God, wow. It's been a while since I heard this one. Yeah, This is Ruff Squad. "And Ting"! Yeah! We've mentioned multiple times about growing up in London and the culture that's here and a whole strain of music that only exists here. Or at least it's filtering out into the world.

IC: I first saw a Grime gig way after it'd already become – you know, Tinchy was huge, Dizzee and stuff. You were saying that I was watching it with an open mouth. The energy to me is extremely optimistic and positive. I find there's this general apathy towards life in pop music, it's just like, 'OK, this is a nice song, these are some nice vocals, it's cool, it's playable, it's something that people can get used to listening to.' This is uncompromising to me.

DB: I used to go to Eski dances, and sometimes they weren't the safest, do you know what I mean? I did like when things got a bit mixed, and you wouldn't get in trouble for stepping on someone's trainers. There was a brief period before things got a bit silly where there was this mix, it was that whole kind of punks and rastas... It disappeared after a

couple of months and went somewhere else, but it was a really interesting time, just a sniff of what it was like back then, when the two things completely came together.

IC: I think it's also like a very raw energy that really doesn't exist anywhere else, for me. I was reading this book about French theory that talks about politics, and it's saying that people assume that energy comes from people who think in some sort of left wing way, but it really doesn't anymore. It only exists in kids, they're not affected yet by what the politics are, or because they haven't got really good education they don't know how to understand politics, but they just know something is fucked up. They just go and they express that feeling in this way. It's uncompromised by being politically correct or trying to fit in to some kind of political group or social group. You just know that for whatever reason, your life sucks, or a lot of people's lives suck.

DB: Why it differs is because – I am less theoretical, because I come from that background – for me, I just like the swagger of it as well, because that is the attitude that I have. I'm maybe lucky to see it from both sides, but to be honest a lot of it is just swagger. It's just the mood of the city. □ Hype Williams tour the UK in March: see *Out There*